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# Cycles and Processes

Linda Brophy

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Rochester Institute of Technology

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
The College of Fine And Applied Arts  
in Candidacy for the Degree of  
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

CYCLES AND PROCESSES

By

Linda Brophy

May 1978

APPROVALS

Advisor: Name Illegible

Date: 12 May 1979

Graduate Academic

Council

Representative: Fred Meyer

Date: 5/21/79

Dean, College of

Fine and Applied Arts: Dr. Robert H. Johnston Ph. D.

Date: 5/22/79

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## INTRODUCTION CYCLES AND PROCESSES

*To study art is to study order, relative values, to get at fundamental constructive principles. It is the great study of the inside, not the outside of nature.*

*Robert Henri<sup>1</sup>*

Leonardo Da Vinci once wrote "movement is the cause of all life."<sup>2</sup> I sense this movement in every place, in every thing. It's an endless, cyclic chain of events, with each link at once an independent cyclic process and also a unit of the universal rhythm. I have always sensed these innate rhythms and counter-rhythms; my images are attempts at visualizing these patterns. I have been able to depict an instant of a cycle- but have never been able to convey the unity and continuity of each link. Each image has remained too isolated .

The Watkins Glen Series was begun with the idea of developing a body of work based on one of the smaller cyclic patterns. Elaborating on one place in terms of its own specific processes would enable me to illustrate the more universal applications of the basic cyclic ideas. Dealing with one small segment in a series of prints would necessitate the development of a sophisticated technical language and vocabulary of forms suitable for conveying the ideas. The series, when viewed together, would present the entire Glen cycle. When viewed separately, the prints

would still be able to function as an independent yet complete thought.

The production of the Series, therefore, would fulfill several functions. First, the images would serve as a visual definition of the cyclic ideas. Second, the planning of the prints would involve the development of a precise vocabulary of forms and techniques geared to this specific purpose. All the phases of the production of the work are also cyclic and self-perpetuating: each part feeds every other, and is dependent on all the others for existence. The Series basic function is to act as a prototype for the documentation and investigation of similar cycles.

## I: THE GEOLOGY OF THE GLEN: FOUNDATIONS AND FUTURE

*...(water) wears away the lofty summits of the mountains. It lays bare and carries away the great rocks. It drives away the sea from its ancient shores, for it raises its base with the soil that it carries there. It shatters and devastates the high banks; nor can any stability ever be discerned in these which its nature does not suddenly bring to naught. It seeks out with its rivers every sloping valley where it may carry off or deposit fresh soil. Wherefore many rivers may be said to be those through which all the element has passed and the sea has gone back many times to the sea, and no depth of the ocean is so low but that the loftiest mountains have their bases there... One would say that it suffers change into as many natures as are the different places through which it passes...with time everything changes.*

*Leonardo Da Vinci*

3

Since all the phases of the life cycle of the Glen were my concerns, I began by investigating the geologic processes that had determined its initial formation.

Most geologists agree that there were several major transformations which gave rise to the present structures. The first event was the deposition of the rock layers. This sequence began about 550 million years B.P. (Before Present), when most of New York State was beneath a vast shallow inland sea. Sediment from the nearby land was washed into the sea and deposited there in distinct layers. These layers accumulated over a period of about 325 million years, and grew to be several hundred feet thick. The upper strata of mud and clay hardened into shales, the sand grains ce-



mented into sandstone. Underneath these two was a thick deposit of limestone, composed of bits of shell, and calcium from the bodies of animals that lived in the seas.<sup>4</sup>

About 200 million years ago the ocean floor was lifted above the water; the elements now began to eat away at the exposed rock. As the beds were thrust upward, streams and rivers carved just as rapidly downward through the strata. This erosion was aided further by the actions of rain, snow, ice and wind.

The Ice Ages probably did the most to determine the present structure of the Glen. The first ice sheet to cover the area flowed down from its source in Labrador about one million years ago. The ice was channelled according to the existing conformations of the land, picking up and moving debris in its path. The major topographic modifications were probably made by the first ice advance. Essentially, the second advance followed the courses carved by the first, without making any major changes of its own.<sup>5</sup>

Glacial erosion was most likely the dominant process in the creation of the existing gorge and valley. Glaciers are not rigid unyielding masses; they are extremely mobile. The interior of a glacier is full of currents, much like the currents of a deep stream. When a glacier moves across the land, the interior flow of ice is

directed by the land structures (hills, valleys, etc.). The Seneca Lake region is a narrow valley which flares open to the north. When the ice encountered the narrower southern end, it had to flow faster (because there was just as much ice, but not as much room) so it cut <sup>6</sup> more deeply, and rapidly, than at the valley entrance.

After the retreat of the last glacier (about ten thousand years ago), running water became the dominant erosional factor in this area. These same streams, rivers and waterfalls are shaping the glen today.

The geologic history of the area substantiated my idea that water and rock were the basic components of the Glen cycles. The rock beds were laid down in water; the uplifted beds were eroded by streams and rivers. Even the mud and sand which hardened into the first rock layers came from the erosion of nearby land. The cycle continues today: the streams carve the gorge, and the bits of earth chipped away will be deposited elsewhere, so the cycle can begin again (figures I & II).

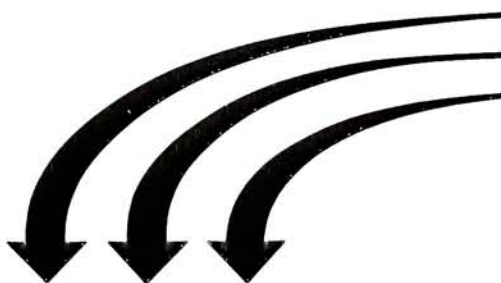
**WATER**



**ROCK**

**GLACIATION**  
**RAIN--SNOW**  
**RIVERS**

**SANDSTONE**  
**SHALE**  
**LIMESTONE**

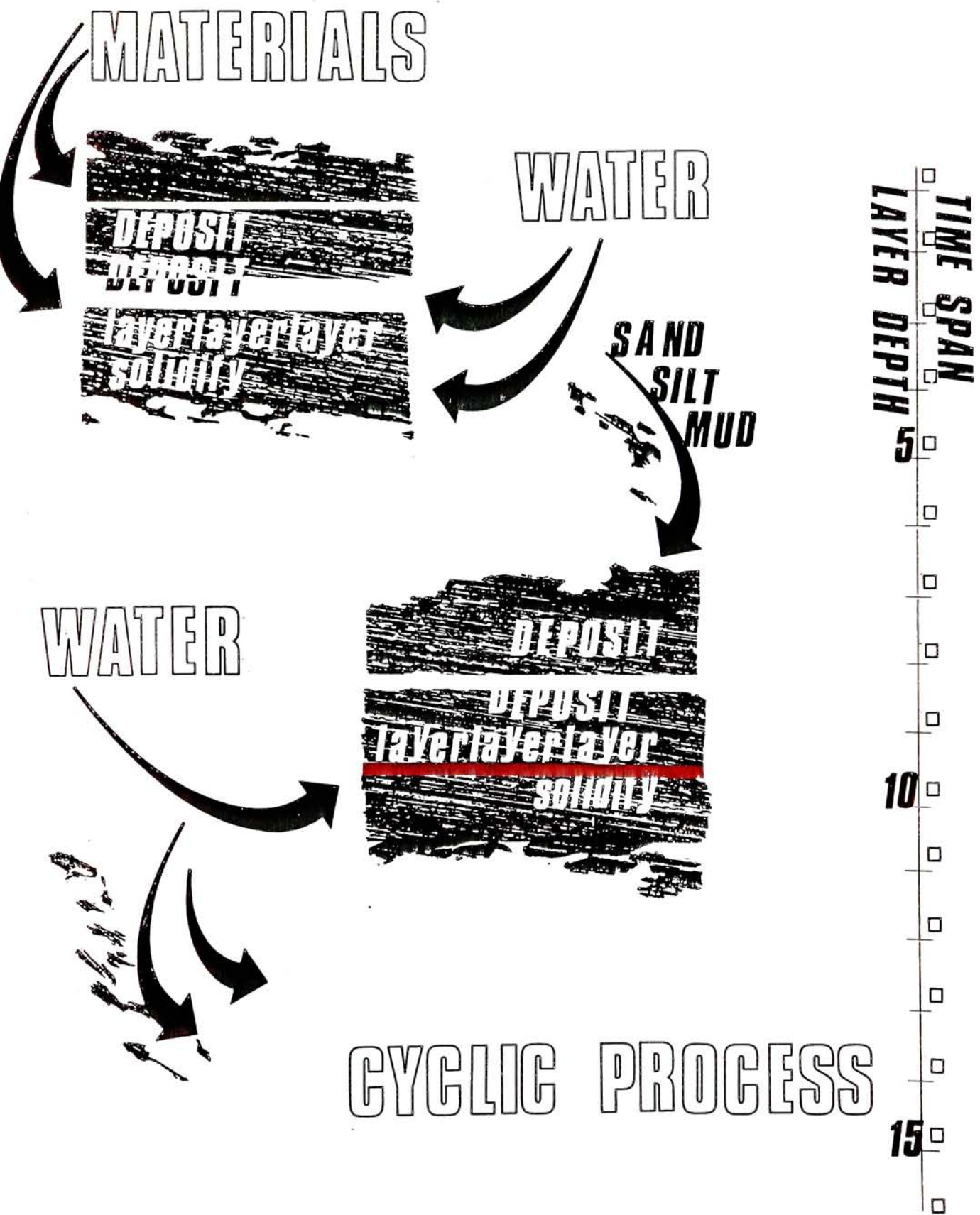


**MATERIALS**  
**FOR DEPOSITION**  
**OF NEW LAYERS**

*active*  
*released*  
*energy*  
*unconfined*  
*passionate*  
*reflective*  
*rapid*  
*change*

*passive*  
*contained*  
*energy*  
*restricted*  
*subdued*  
*absorptive*  
*slow*  
*change*







## 11: THE PLACE - INSIGHT AND RHYTHMS

*I hunt for the rhythms in nature, whether  
it be small or large measures, intimate or  
grand, but internal rhythm it is primarily.  
I am attracted to the vista as well as to the  
intimate.*

Nell Blaine <sup>7</sup>

The patterns of growth have always been a central concern of my imagery. My basic forms are characteristically organic in appearance -- fluid, undulating structures, unrestricted by mechanical lines or tight angles. Their structure may be derived from microscopic examinations of a leaf, or be based on visions of lush mountains or thundering seas. My images are evocations of a landscape, not renderings of it. "It is not my purpose to paint the surface of things which all may see, unaided by imagination. To imitate the outward and visible forms of Nature, to paint faithful descriptions...accurate in form and color, is a form of landscape art which does not make the slightest appeal to me. Great rocks, great trees, great rivers of themselves mean very little to me, except as symbols of a great Universal Power, an Eternal Vital Principle, which makes and shapes tree and rock and river equally with myself. When I feel that, I am awed and reverent. The whole world appeals to me as one vast miracle, and I am part of the whole. It is this stupendous miracle of creation which takes possession of my thoughts and compels me to seek some form of expression."<sup>8</sup>

There is a special sort of "landscape" in every facet of nature. Look beyond the surface of things, and seek instead the inner essence present in everything. I call this essence the "innerscape". Each innerscape is like a cell in a living thing: it is an independent unit, yet also an inseparable part of a larger phenomenon. The larger unit is built up of these smaller independent cycles, as well as being cyclic in itself: it has no origin and no termination. The destruction of one part feeds the building of another.

I had previously tried to visualize this idea, but all attempts had failed to convey the complexities of the cyclic ideas. It was impossible to translate all this information into one coherent image. I decided to change my approach, and deal with the ideas from the standpoint of a single, smaller cycle unit. Moreover, I would do this by means of a series of prints. By demonstrating the integrity of an individual cycle in all its phases I could better illustrate how all the parts are critical elements in the larger movements.

I needed an appropriate example in order to be able to convey these ideas clearly. I decided that illustrating the cyclic nature of the phenomenon at Watkins Glen, N.Y. would be ideal for my purposes.

The presently existing formations - the waterfalls, streams and stone -- were the initial stimuli for the images.

There were great amounts of energy in the falls and streams; you could almost feel the power released as the water chiseled the rock. The stone and water were complementary opposites to me. The rock was passive and somber hued, but it was merely power at rest, energy trapped in stone. The water was the active principle: here the energy was released. The flood demolished the rock and released its energy: the power in the rock was in its destiny to be carried away and laid down in quieter waters so the strata could form again. No energy is lost in this system. It is always being transferred from one part of the system to another, working (in the form of water) or resting (in stone).

Because of the existing formations and activity of the water courses, it was evident these actions had been continuing for eons, and would continue for eons more. Here were all the elements I needed to develop the cyclic history of one place: a past history, captured in the present structures, and a future promised by the ongoing activities. Now that I had chosen a focus and direction for my prints, I was free to begin planning my approach.

## 111: TECHNIQUE AND TRANSFORMATIONS

*To study technique means to make it, to invent it. To take the raw materials each time anew and twist it into shape. It must be made to serve a specific purpose...there is a great pleasure in the effort to invent the exact thing which is needed. Use it. Break it down. Begin again. It is a great thing ~~when~~ one has a fair measure of seeing. Then to invent the means of expressing it.* 9

Robert Henri

When I began to work on the Glen Series, my attitudes and approach to printmaking began to change. In the past, I would work from fairly detailed master drawings. These would be copied onto the stone in order to achieve a lithograph as much like the original sketch as possible. Technically, the results were satisfactory. However, the final images lacked the sense of freedom and vigor I knew was needed to achieve a successful series.

I had to concentrate on developing technical abilities and visual language more suited to my new goals. I knew I had to alter my approach to the initial drawing of the image on stone if I was going to succeed in rendering the energy that impressed me. I abandoned preliminary drawings entirely, and began experimentation to see what types of marks and textures could be made that would be useful in conveying my thoughts. I gathered a wide range of materials to work with - stick and liquid tusche, lithographic



crayons, rubbing sticks, autographic ink, india ink, vaseline - anything that might be greasy enough to print. I also assembled a variety of tools for applicators, ranging from the usual paintbrushes, to toothbrushes, bits of cloth and leather, chips of wood, gauze-wrapped dowels, used tarlatan, and several homemade textured rollers made of wood, aluminum, cloth and sponge. Solvents and razors, needles and scribes were used to alter the drawn images. Any vaguely servicable material or technique that could be devised was legitimate.

This phase of experimentation revealed many new possibilities for working. It is important to note that I was able to approach the stone so freely only when confident in my mastery of the processing and printing problems. When I worked more conservatively I was much more involved in learning how to control the medium. Once these obstacles were overcome, seeing what the medium really had to offer could be explored. I don't believe a successful Series could have been possible without first acquiring the ability to control the processing problems. These free investigations made use of every printing skill I had, and helped me learn and perfect a few I didn't.

Work habits and techniques changed to suit the problem at hand. Tight master drawings constricted my imagery, so I eliminated the preliminary sketches. My old repertoire of forms were equally unsuitable for the new motive. "Motive demands specific technique. The finer the motive, the more

the artist sees significance in what he looks at, the more he must be precise in his choice of terms."<sup>10</sup>

While trying to develop ideas for lithographs, I found I couldn't organize my thoughts enough to plan a coherent image. There was too much to deal with at once. I needed a rapid method of working out ideas for possible images, but wanted to make prints, not drawings or paintings. So, I began to make monoprints.

The monoprinting began with this idea of having an alternate experimental printmaking method that would not take the time of lithos. They were valuable to the development of the lithos because many of the initial image rendering techniques were similar to those possible on stone. Blank zinc plates were used as a receptive surface for printing; the image was constructed by applying any type of ink or paint to the surface of the plate, using the same tools as for the stone. The monoprints were a definite plus because of the ability to work out an image in many colors at once: a six color litho could take two weeks; a monoprint, with an even greater color range, an hour. Many problems could be resolved with the monoprints before moving to a stone.

The use of monoprinting slowly extended beyond that of a visualizing aid. They became resolved images in their own right, and added breadth and coherency to the whole Series. The monoprints and lithographs functioned within a cycle of their own - each expanded the possibilities of the others'

technical vocabulary and imagery quality. The mediums proved to be complimentary and reinforcing, and helped the ideas and execution of the Series develop fully.

#### IV: THE PRINTS AND THE PLACE

*Nature is the unique great realm upon which art feeds.*

*Edvard Munch*

*Art is the inevitable consequence of growth and is the manifestation of the principles of its origin. The work of art is a result; is the output of a progress in development and stands as a record and marks the degree of development. It is not an end in itself, but the work indicates the course taken and the progress made. The work is not a finality. It promises more, and from it projection can be made. It is the impress of those who live in full play of their faculties. The individual passes, living his life, and the things he touches bear the trace of his passing. They give evidence of the quality of his growth. The impress is made sometimes in material form, as in sculpture or painting, and sometimes in ways more fluid, dispersed, but nonetheless revealing of the principles of growth.*

*Robert Henri*<sup>11</sup>

The first prints of the Series established the techniques and manner of execution for the subsequent images. It was a definite building process, and is best illustrated chronologically.

Most of the problems -- and solutions -- to the Series came up in the printing of Structure Series, #2 (Plate 1), the first Glen print to be completed. Specifically, this image showed the problems that could occur if my thoughts weren't organized before I began work. The image was laid out by pencilling in the major diagonal and the lower circular form. I could see in my mind's eye what I wanted to capture: the rock strata, the smooth curves of the water polished stone, the flakes of sand caught in the swirling

streams. To emphasize the energy, the first run was double printed, first in a cool, dark grey, then a lighter, warmer grey, which was off registered slightly. This off registration made the dark edges of the underlying color vibrate. The surface effect was active - too active. There was too much in one image; too many impressions that would have worked better isolated were jumbled together. There was no major structure, no focal point. I resolved the confusion by organizing large areas with flat, fluid structures, printed over the initial runs in somber, transparent layers. The image was reorganized around the diagonal motion and clutching shape, which are free impressions of common rock formations. This print really emphasized the importance of having a clear idea in mind before approaching the stone. "All satisfying things are good organizations. The forms are related to each other, there is a dominant movement among them to a supreme conclusion."<sup>12</sup>

The basic procedures for all subsequent Series prints were established in this edition. I preferred to work guided by memories of the place, rather than from photos or drawings. Working from memory helped insure my images would be free of the previous tendency to tight reproduction. I did keep a full selection of slides of the area for reference, primarily for refreshing my memory about specific structural details and color relationships. The slides also helped me mentally focus my energies so I would not repeat the errors of Series #2.



At this time the first monoprints were made. I produced about forty small single and multiple plate images, several of which are represented here (Plates II & III). The small three plate monoprint The Glen: Materials (Plate IV) was the product of my first attempts at making monoprints. The soft textures and quiet colors were the result of calculated applications of different types of solvents. This print was pulled near the end of a day's session of printing, so my palette was very blended and muted. The view is primarily an aerial perspective, but is not based on any actual maps (though I had survey maps of the area). I chose to construct an aerial view from my firsthand knowledge of the spot. The smooth, curving quality of the narrow gorge line could also be interpreted as either a small section of a stream, the entire stream bed, or a microscopic segment of a slice of rock. The Series images were finally starting to fulfill the criterion of the cyclic ideas: each segment fits in the whole in many ways, implying the variable and changes possible within each cycle. It could be an impression of the nature of past changes, or a view of present structures. In this manner, one print offers a solution to many possible events in the particular Glen cycle, and stresses the idea of the repetition of events in any cycle.

The Material print was the direct inspiration for the lithograph Structure Series, Phase I (topographic) (Plate V). The stone was approached in the same manner I executed the

plate: the image was painted directly on the ground surface. The monoprint was not used as a guide except when the major placement of structures was pencilled in. The first color was printed twice, off registered slightly the second time the paper was dropped in order to achieve the agitated surface. This was the first time I used words and letters in a litho: they were employed to give the image the feeling of a familiar (yet altered) topographic map. The dashed lines and compass markings were also used to establish reference points. The use of familiar symbols limited the number of possible interpretations of the litho (as opposed to the monoprint). Structure Impression illustrated the possibilities of translating monoprint images into lithographs without directly copying them: the forms had to be allowed to grow in the translation from one medium to another. Slavish copying would stifle the rhythmic growth of the ideas.

Structure Series, Formation B (Plate VI) illustrated my impressions of pothole formation and structure. Potholes are rounded depressions in a stream bed, which were formed where a rapidly flowing stream developed a circular swirl. The rock bits in the water ground a hollow, where pebbles and boulders were caught. The larger stones, trapped in the hollow, were rolled around and around, grinding the hole into a broad bellied pot.<sup>13</sup> The print shows a spot where two potholes formed near each other; eventually, the rock

between them wore away, leaving only a rounded peak of stone. The image suggests the actual formation, but also stresses the more general rounded quality of much of the rock due to the destructiveness of the flowing water. Eventually the peak of stone will erode away completely. Even in the print it seems to be starting to shrink back against the farther rock wall.

The large monoprint Lower Cascade Prototype was the last Series print made. I began the monoprint in order to resolve ideas for a litho which would show a particular view of a section of a small waterfall. The print was never translated into a lithograph; I felt the monoprint techniques were better suited to the idea. The qualities of the color and structure were such that I could not render them as well on a stone based image. At this point the monoprints became valuable as wholly independent units, critical to the Series not only for their value as ideas to be rephrased as lithos, but because they could be unique images that did not demand such translation. The quality of the color, form and structure in this monoprint and in the last litho (Formation B) came closest to the ideas I had when the Glen Series idea was first formulated. Both went quickly and developed almost effortlessly. The progression from the initial ideas, through the drawing, processing and printing flowed in one smooth motion. I knew at this point I had achieved what I hoped I would at the



outset of my efforts: the harmony between my theories  
and their translation into successful images.

## V: THE END IS A BEGINNING

*The greatness of art is not in the display  
of knowledge, or in material accuracy, but  
in the distinctness with which it conveys the  
impressions of a personal vital force, that  
acts spontaneously, without fear or hesitation.*  
George Inness<sup>14</sup>

Working back and forth from the monoprints to the lithographs allowed me to produce a series covering a wide range of possibilities. The mediums were complimentary; discoveries in one opened up possibilities for new expressive qualities in the other. Each fed the other: the Materials monoprint inspired the Topographic lithograph; Formation B grew with the Lower Cascade. Thus, working back and forth between the lithographs and monoprints was cyclic also. One print developed and expanded the ideas started in another. Each part was indispensable to the development of the whole.

The evolution of my cyclic theory applications and the concurrent advance in the technical language and vocabulary that expressed them were taken to new levels in the Glen Series. I devised several methods to compose a coherent body of work whose individual images reflected a common stimulus. While planning the imagery I learned how to manipulate printmaking media which complimented and reinforced my fundamental aims. The visual examples of the cyclic idea helped expand the theories and develop them more clearly,

and the theories continued to feed the imagery. In the end, I found that the printing of the Series and the subject of it were as cyclic and interdependent as the Glen processes were cyclic unto themselves.

The Glen Series is a complete body of work, but the ideas on which it was based are far from finished. The Series opened up new possibilities for future work; the cycle continues.

## PLATES

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ALL SIZES ARE GIVEN IN INCHES.  
HEIGHT PRECEDES WIDTH.



Plate 1

STRUCTURE SERIES no. 2

lithograph 21 x 29½

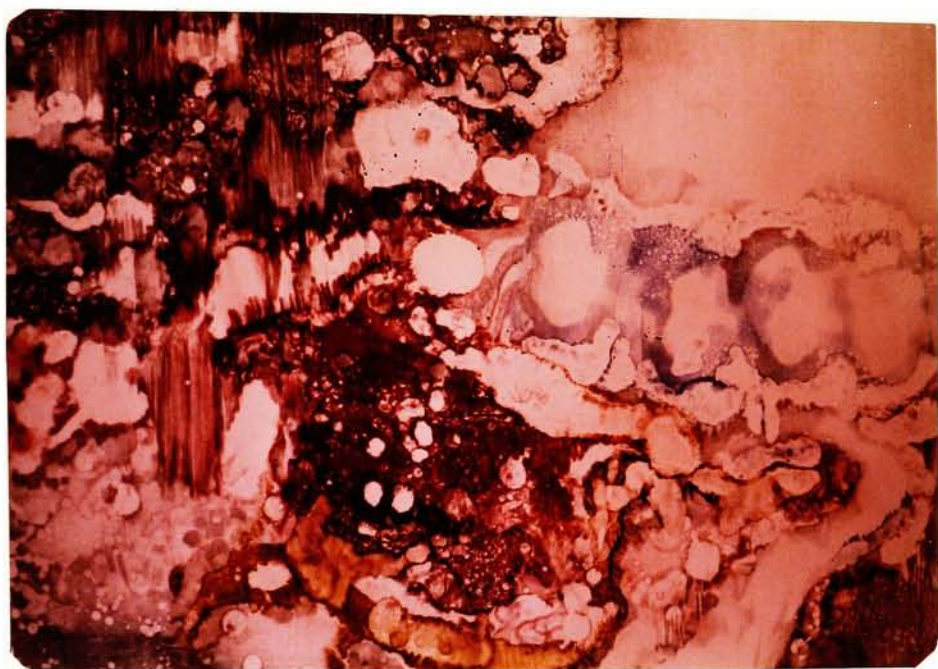


PLATE II

STRUCTURE SERIES 6 (orthanc)

monoprint

24 x 36



PLATE III

SPACE PROBLEM 24

monoprint 10 x 7





PLATE IV

THE GLEN: MATERIALS

monoprint

8 x 3





PLATE V

WATKINS GLEN: STRUCTURE IMPRESSION, PHASE I (topographic)

lithograph

21 x 29

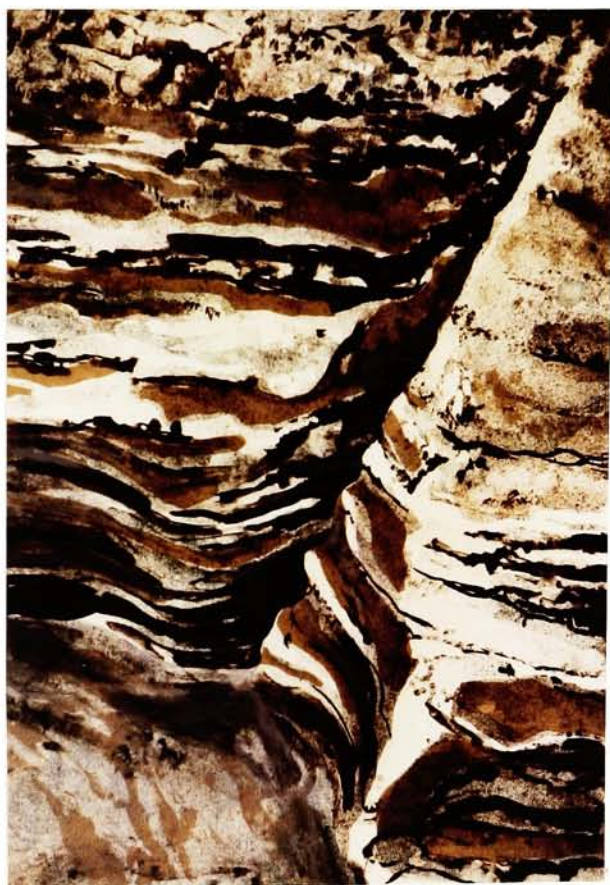


PLATE VI

STRUCTURE SERIES, FORMATION B

lithograph

30 x 21



PLATE VII

STRUCTURE SERIES, LOWER CASCADE  
(prototype)

lithograph

36 x 24

ADDITIONAL WORK,  
WATKINS GLEN SERIES



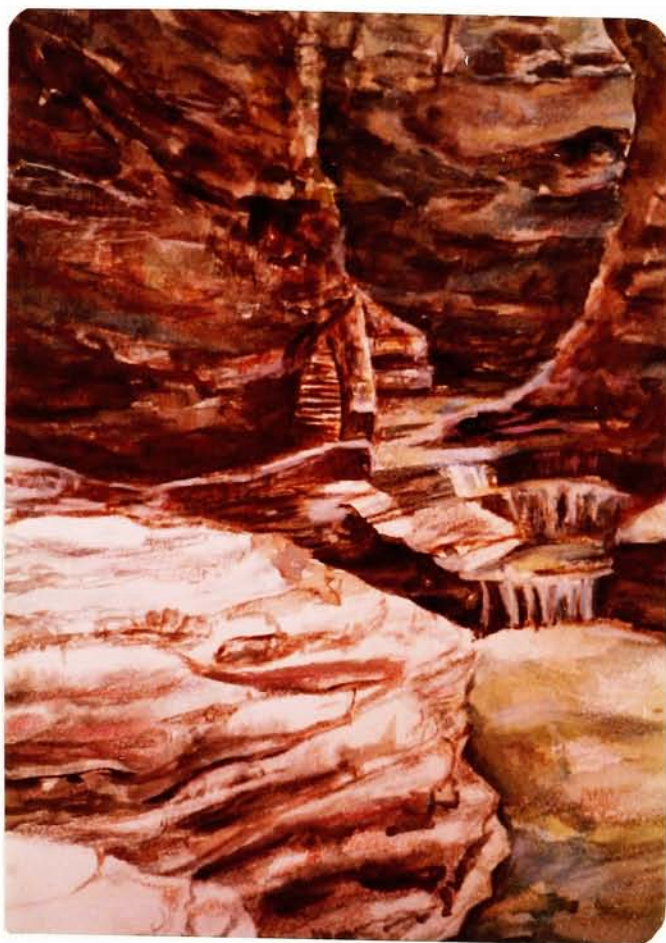


PLATE A

untitled

watercolor 15 x 10

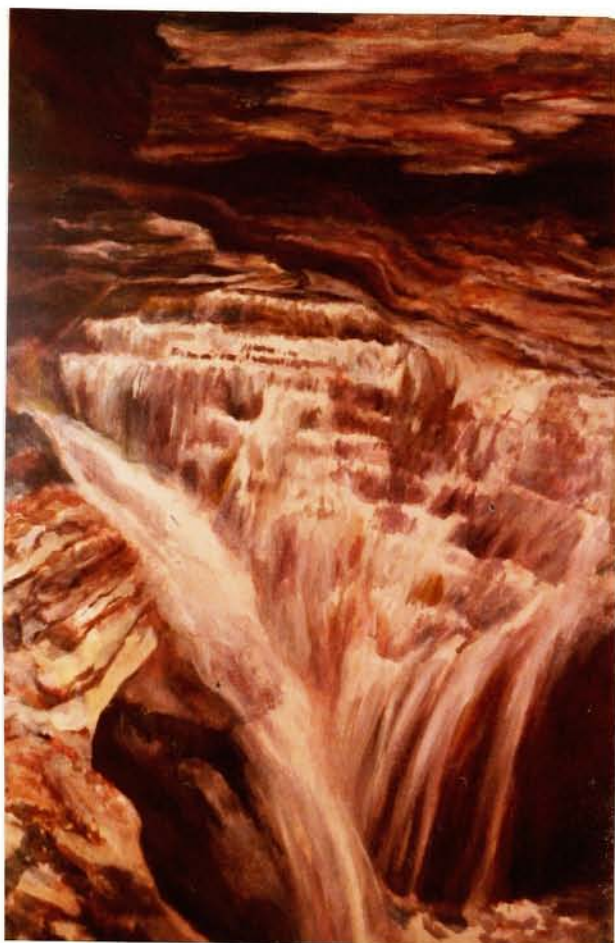


PLATE B

LOWER CASCADE

acrylics 31 x 20

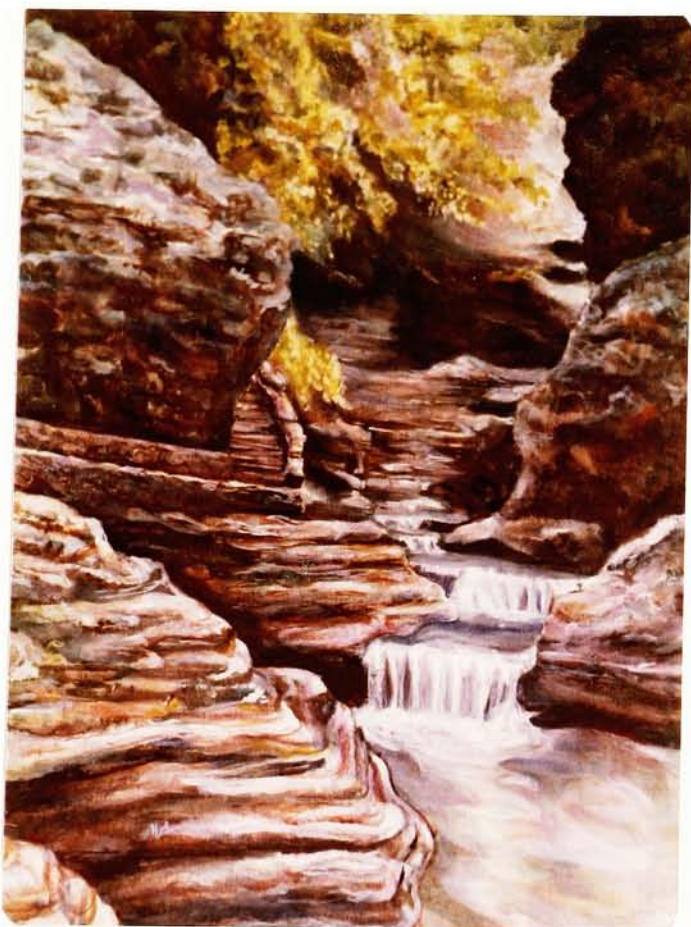


PLATE C

GORGE FALLS

acrylics 31 x 24



PLATE D

STRUCTURE SERIES, FORMATION C

Lithograph

21 x 30



## NOTES

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- 2 Leonardo Da Vinci, The Notebooks of Leonardo Da Vinci; ed. by Edward MacCurdy, New York: Reynalt Hithcock, Inc, 1939, p. 72
- 3 Ibid., p. 734
- 4 O.D. Von Engeln, The Finger Lakes Region; New York: Cornell Univ. Press, 1961, p.3.
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- 6 Ibid., p. 79.
- 7 Alan Gussow, A Sense of Place; New York: Friends of the Earth/Seaburg Press, 1971, p. 136.
- 8 Ibid., p. 158.
- 9 Henri, p. 88.
- 10 Herschel B. Chipp, Theories of Modern Art; Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1963,
- 11 Henri, p. 67.
- 12 Ibid, p. 97.
- 13 Engeln, p. 73-76
- 14 Gussow, p. 94.

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